

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 10386

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E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJECT: GISCARD'S NEW (OLD) STRATEGY

REF: PARIS 9994

SUMMARY. THE BREATHTAKING SUCCESSION OF MEETINGS LAST
WEEK AND THIS WEEK BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND POLITICAL
AND LABOR LEADERS WOULD HAVE BEEN UNTHINKABLE BEFORE
MARCH 19. AFTER THE MAJORITY'S BIG VICTORY AND AFTER
GISCARD'S CONCILIATORY SPEECH ON MARCH 22 (REFTEL), A
COMPLETELY NEW POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE SEEMS TO PREVAIL.
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IT IS A SUPERFICIAL AND DECEPTIVE ATMOSPHERE, FOR NEI-
THER OF THE TWO MAIN OPPOSITION PARTIES HAS CHANGED ITS
BASIC POLICIES AND NONE OF FRANCE'S MAIN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL PROBLEMS WHICH DIVIDE THE COUNTRY ARE ANY CLOSER
TO BEING SOLVED. BUT THE CONTEXT OF THE IMMEDIATE POST-
ELECTION PERIOD IS DIFFERENT FROM THAT WHICH EXISTED
BEFORE MARCH 19, AND GISCARD IS MOVING VERY FAST TO EX-

PLOIT THE SITUATION. HE HAS A NUMBER OF STRONG CARDS TO PLAY (AS WELL AS SOME OBVIOUS HANDICAPS) AND SEEMS TO BE BOTH MORE WILLING AND IN A BETTER POSITION TO PLAY THEM THAN AT ANY PREVIOUS TIME SINCE WINNING THE PRESIDENCY IN 1974. GISCARD'S METHOD REMAINS GRADUALIST, RULING OUT IN HIS SPEECH ANY RAIDING OF OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS IN HIS NEXT GOVERNMENT, LOOKING RATHER TO A MORE GENERAL OPENING TO ADDITIONAL, LESS POLITICIZED CATEGORIES OF FRENCH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE. END SUMMARY.

1. A SECOND CHANCE FOR GISCARD: EACH OF THE FOUR MAIN POLITICAL GROUPS IS CLAIMING VICTORY IN THE MARCH ELECTIONS: THE UDF FOR REBALANCING THE MAJORITY, THE PCF IN TERMS OF ADDITIONAL SEATS WON IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE PS FOR ITS POPULAR VOTE GAIN COMPARED TO 1973, AND THE RPR FOR REMAINING WELL AHEAD AS THE BIGGEST GROUP IN THE ASSEMBLY. THEY ARE ALL PARTIALLY JUSTIFIED IN THEIR CLAIMS, BUT ALSO WRONG IN IMPLYING THEY WERE THE CLEAR WINNERS. THE ONLY BIG WINNER WAS GISCARD. WHAT WAS MORE VAGUELY TERMED A CHOICE OF SOCIETY DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AFTER MARCH 19 AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT'S CONSTITUTIONAL AND POLITICAL ROLE. IT IS ONLY A SLIGHT EXAGGERATION TO CALL THE MARCH ELECTIONS A SURROGATE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND TO VIEW GISCARD AS A PRESIDENT-ELECT WITH A RENEWED MANDATE FOR THE FINAL THREE YEARS OF HIS TERM OF OFFICE. CONFIDENTIAL

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2. VGE'S MEETINGS LAST WEEK WITH MAIRE (CFDT), BERGERON (FO), GINGEMBRE (PME) AND CHARPENTIE (CGC) AND THIS WEEK WITH MITTERRAND (PS), MARCHAIS (PCF), FABRE (MRG), SEGUY (CGT) AND DEBATISSE (FNSEA) ARE THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD THE IMPROVED POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CLIMATE HE HAS ENVISAGED SINCE 1974. INTERSPERSED WITH THESE MEETINGS ARE TALKS WITH CHIRAC (RPR) AND LECANUET (UDF), BEFORE DECIDING ON THE NATURE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT IN THE FIRST DAYS OF APRIL. GISCARD'S OBJECTIVE, EXPLAINED IN HIS BOOK "DEMOCRATIE FRANCAISE", AND ELABORATED WITH REMARKABLE CONSISTENCY IN SUBSEQUENT SPEECHES, CAN BE SUMMARIZED TO INCLUDE: A MORE CIVILIZED POLITICAL DEBATE BETWEEN THE OPPOSITION AND MAJORITY, A LIBERAL LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORM -- DESIRED AND SUPPORTED BY 60 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH PUBLIC -- AND THE POSSIBILITY OF UNDRAMATIC ALTERNANCE OF GOVERNMENT BETWEEN THE CENTER-RIGHT AND THE CENTER-LEFT.

3. SEVERAL REASONS CAN BE GIVEN FOR THE SPEED WITH WHICH GISCARD HAS ALREADY MOVED IN EXTENDING THE INVITATIONS ABOVE. THEY ARE REASONS WHICH COULD LEAD HIM TO

CONTINUE THIS HECTIC PACE, IN OTHER WAYS, OVER THE
NEXT FEW MONTHS:

-- HE HAS NO DOUBT LEARNED SOME LESSONS FROM THE
POST-1974 EXPERIENCE, WHEN HE WAS CRITICIZED
FOR NOT CALLING NEW LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, AT

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A TIME WHEN HIS POPULARITY WAS HIGH, TO GIVE
HIMSELF THE ASSEMBLY HE NEEDED TO PASS HIS
LEGISLATION. HIS POPULARITY BEING AT A NEAR
ALL-TIME HIGH AND NOW HANDED AN ASSEMBLY MORE
TO HIS CHOOSING, GISCARD MUST USE THIS CAPITAL
WHILE IT LASTS.

-- THE POST-ELECTION PERIOD, IF NOT YET ONE OF
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, IS AT BEST A TEMPO-
RARY HONEYMOON PERIOD FOR THE WINNER. THE FACT
THAT THERE ARE NO OTHER DECISIVE ELECTIONS

LOOMING ON THE NEAR HORIZON SHOULD EXTEND THIS
GRACE PERIOD EVEN MORE THAN IS USUALLY THE
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CASE. GISCARD WILL THEREFORE BE GIVEN THE TIME
TO SHOW WHAT HE WANTS TO DO. EVEN THE OPPOSI-
TION WILL GIVE HIM SOME TIME TO DRAW CONCLU-
SIONS FROM ELECTIONS IN WHICH NEARLY ONE-HALF
OF THE ELECTORATE VOTED AGAINST THE MAJORITY.
-- THE GAULLISTS ARE FEWER (THOUGH MORE UNIFIED)
IN THE ASSEMBLY THAN IN 1974, ABOUT 150 VERSUS
173; WHILE THE UDF AT SOMETHING OVER 130,
FORMED FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF CARRYING
OUT THE PRESIDENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM, WILL
GIVE HIM FOR THE FIRST TIME A SOLID BASE FROM
WHICH TO GO HUNTING FOR WIDER SUPPORT.
-- THE DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE PS/MRG AND PCF HAVE
BEEN CLEVERLY EXPLOITED BY GISCARD. MITTER-
RAND AGREED (AFTER MAIRE HAD ALREADY ASKED FOR
A MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT) TO A MEETING, IN
PART SO AS NOT TO APPEAR A POOR LOSER. ONCE HE
AGREED, THE OTHERS COULD NOT AFFORD TO BE ISO-
LATED FROM THE PROCESS. PROGRAMMATIC DIFFER-
ENCES AMONG THESE PARTIES, OBVIOUS DURING THE
CAMPAIGN, WILL GIVE GISCARD OTHER OPPORTUNITIES
TO PLAY ONE OFF AGAINST THE OTHER.
-- FINALLY, THE FRENCH PUBLIC SEEMS TO HAVE HAD
ITS FILL (AT LEAST TEMPORARILY) OF BI-POLARIZED
POLITICS AND GENERALLY SUPPORTS GISCARD'S INI-
TIATIVES TO DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION AND
EVEN TRY TO WORK WITH IT AT ARM'S LENGTH. THE
MEDIA'S REACTION HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY FAVOR-
ABLE.

4.BUT MANY HURDLES TOO: THE SURPRISE OF YESTER-
DAY AND EUPHORIA OF TODAY COULD VERY EASILY GIVE WAY TO
DISAPPOINTMENT TOMORROW. NOBODY EXPECTS MUCH CONCRETE
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TO COME OUT OF THE TALKS OF THESE TWO WEEKS. EACH PO-
LITICAL LEADER OF THE LEFT WILL USE THE MEETINGS TO PRE-
SENT HIMSELF AS THE TRUE DEFENDER OF THE WORKING CLASS
AND TRY TO TAKE CREDIT FOR HAVING ARGUED ITS CASE BE-
FORE THE PRESIDENT. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MEETINGS WILL
BE MAINLY SYMBOLIC. THEY WILL HAVE MORE MEANING ONLY IF
THEY ARE FOLLOWED UP BY OTHER, PERIODIC CONTACTS WITH

SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT AND BY ACTION. DURING THIS PERIOD, OTHER PROCESSES WILL BE AT WORK WHICH WILL COMPLICATE THE PRESIDENT'S GAME PLAN.

-- THE UDF IS FOR THE PRESENT A COLLECTION OF PR, CDS, RS AND OTHER MAJORITY DEPUTIES, WITH ALMOST NO NATIONAL ORGANIZATION, PRESENCE OR IDENTITY. TO DEVELOP INTO A COHESIVE AND EFFECTIVE ASSEMBLY GROUP AND A NATIONAL FEDERATION OF PARTIES, ITS INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS AND RESPECTIVE LEADERS WILL HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER MUCH BETTER THAN THEY HAVE IN THE PAST. MANY OBSERVERS ARE SKEPTICAL, BUT PAST FAILURES TO COOPERATE SHOULD NOT EXCLUDE A MORE SUCCESSFUL EFFORT THIS TIME. BEYOND ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS AND PERSONAL RIVALRIES, THE REAL TEST WILL COME OVER LEGISLATIVE BILLS AND VOTING DISCIPLINE. THESE PARTIES HAVE OFTEN DIFFERED IN THE PAST OVER DOMESTIC REFORMS (THE CDS AND RS BEING MORE PROGRESSIVE THAN THE PR) AND EVEN ON FOREIGN POLICY (THE EUROPEANIST CDS CLASHING WITH GAULLIST-LEANING MEMBERS OF THE PR). THE ROLE OF THE PRIME MINISTER IN DISCIPLINING AND CAJOLING DISSIDENT MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP ADDS IMPORTANCE TO GISCARD'S EVENTUAL CHOICE FOR THIS POST.

-- PREVIOUS PRIME MINISTERS COULD COUNT ON THE RPR AND OTHER MAJORITY PARTIES WITHDRAWING FROM THE PRECIPICE OF A NO-CONFIDENCE VOTE AT THE LAST MINUTE BECAUSE THE OMINOUS SPECTER

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OF A UNITED LEFT WAS ALWAYS THERE. FREE OF THIS DANGER NOW, THE RPR WILL BE FREER TO

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PRESS AHEAD ON ITS OWN PLATFORM (INVESTMENT
INCENTIVES, ELIMINATING UNEMPLOYMENT) AND REACT
STRONGLY TO WHAT IT WILL PROBABLY CHARACTERIZE
INSUFFICIENCIES IN THE FUTURE GOF'S PROGRAM.

A WARNING IN THE PARTY'S OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
HAS ALREADY SET THE TONE FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY
SESSION: "THE PRESIDENT CALLS FOR A REASONA-
BLE COHABITATION BETWEEN THE MAJORITY AND
OPPOSITION. BEFORE ACHIEVING THAT, IT WOULD BE
WELL NOT TO PRACTICE AN UNREASONABLE COHABITA-
TION AMONG THE PARTIES OF THE MAJORITY". THE
LONG-STANDING GISCARDIAN/GAULLIST RIVALRY HAS

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NOT WAITED FOR THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT (APRIL
3) TO MANIFEST ITSELF. EACH LOBBY HAS SURFACED
ITS CANDIDATE FOR ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT, CHIRAC
BACKING EDGAR FAURE AND LIBERAL GAULLISTS DOING
GISCARD'S LEGWORK IN BACKING CHABAN-DELMAS.
NOTHING WILL BE AS ILL-VIEWED BY CHIRAC AS
GISCARDIAN EFFORTS TO SPLIT HIS PARTY.

-- NEITHER IS THE PS IN ANY MOOD AT PRESENT TO
MAKE LIFE EASY FOR GISCARD. WOUNDED BY WHAT IT
CONSIDERS PCF BETRAYAL AND PRACTICALLY UNANI-
MOUS IN REJECTING ANY POSSIBLE DEALS WITH THE
CENTER/RIGHT, THE PS IS CALLING FOR A REEXAMI-
NATION OF ITS PAST STRATEGY AND A REGROUPMENT
AROUND ITS OWN SOCIALIST PROGRAM. THE COMMON

PROGRAM MAY BE DEAD, BUT FOR THE PS THE UNION OF THE LEFT REMAINS THE GOAL, THE ONLY WAY TO COME TO POWER AND AT THE SAME TIME REMAIN FAITHFUL TO ITS BELIEFS. THE PARTY'S FOCUS NOW IS ON RALLYING THE "PROGRESSIVE FORCES" IN THE COUNTRY, BY INCREASING ITS ACTIVITIES IN FACTORIES AND BY PLAYING TOUGH WITH THE PCF IN THE NEWLY CONQUERED MUNICIPALITIES. SUCH A POSITION MAY PERMIT THE PS TO VOTE FOR GOF BILLS -- INDEED, MITTERRAND PROBABLY ENCOURAGED GISCARD IN THEIR MEETING TO TAKE STEPS WHICH WOULD AMOUNT TO ADOPTING PARTS OF THE COMMON PROGRAM -- BUT WITHOUT TYING ITS HANDS FROM CRITICIZING THE GOF IN THE SAME HARSH TERMS AS IN THE PAST. THE PROSPECT OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN 1981 ADDS ANOTHER REASON FOR THE PS NOT TO COMPROMISE ITSELF TOO MUCH IN COOPERATING WITH THE UDF.

-- FINALLY, THE PCF WILL HAVE ITS EYE FIXED ON THE
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PS AS MUCH AS THE MAJORITY, IN ORDER TO EXPLOIT ANY BACKSLIDING BY ITS FORMER PARTNERS AND STAND UP AS THE TRUE DEFENDERS IN THE LEFT OF THE WORKERS. TO THE EXTENT THE PCF WISHES TO PROMOTE ITS OPENING TO OTHER SOCIAL CATEGORIES (ITS APPEAL THROUGH THE "UNION OF FRENCH PEOPLE" TO CATHOLICS, WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS, THE RURAL POPULATION, ETC.), ITS TRADITIONAL VOTE AGAINST GOF BILLS COULD BRING IT INTO CONFLICT WITH ITS ELECTORAL TACTICS. THESE WILL BECOME A MORE IMPORTANT CONCERN AS 1981 APPROACHES, THE PARTY HAVING ALREADY ANNOUNCED IT INTENDS TO RUN ITS OWN CANDIDATE. GISCARD'S PLAN WOULD PROBABLY BE SERVED BY A CONTINUED NEGATIVE ATTITUDE BY THE PCF, WHICH WOULD TEND TO ISOLATE AND MARGINALIZE THE PARTY. BUT THE COMMUNISTS ARE AS AWARE OF THE GISCARDIAN PLAN AS ANYONE, AND WILL DO, AS IN THE PAST, WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN THEIR 20 PERCENT OF THE FRENCH ELECTORATE.

5. THE START OF A PROCESS? GISCARD HAS BEEN FAST OFF THE MARK BECAUSE THE TIME IS RIPE AND BECAUSE HE DOESN'T HAVE MUCH TIME. IT WON'T BE LONG, PROBABLY SOMETIME LATE NEXT YEAR, BEFORE ELECTION FEVER RETURNS TO FRANCE, THIS TIME FOR THE PRESIDENTIALS. GISCARD HAS TO MOVE AS FAR AS POSSIBLE BEFORE THAT CAMPAIGN BEGINS, OTHERWISE BY THAT TIME THE POLITICAL STRUCTURES INHERITED AND ACCENTUATED DURING THE FIFTH REPUBLIC WILL RE-

TURN FRANCE TO HER BIPOLARIZED SELF. THE PRESIDENT MAY
WELL BE CALCULATING THAT HE MUST FOLLOW UP ON HIS PRESENT
INITIATIVES AT A PACE WHICH WILL CREATE THE MOMENTUM
AND PUBLIC SUPPORT NECESSARY TO RESIST A RELAPSE INTO
THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF TWO IMPLACABLY HOSTILE SIDES.
WHAT SORT OF MEASURES IS HE LIKELY TO PROPOSE?

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6. PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION HAS OFTEN BEEN CONSIDERED
THE BEST WAY TO BREAK DOWN THE TWO BLOCS. BUT, GIVEN
THE RPR'S OBSTINATE RESISTANCE TO SUCH AN ELECTORAL

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CHANGE, EVEN GISCARD WILL PROBABLY FEEL THIS MEASURE IS TOO ABRUPT AT THIS EARLY DATE. IN ANY CASE, SO HE HAS SAID, THE TWO BLOCS ARE ALREADY BROKEN DOWN INTO FOUR MAJOR FORMATIONS. MORE LIKELY, GISCARD WILL PROPOSE OTHER "ANGLO-SAXON" PROCEDURES, WITH OF COURSE ADAPTATION TO LOCAL CONDITIONS. (A) INITIATE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION IN THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES AS A MODEST, BUT SIGNIFICANT SUGGESTION. THIS WOULD GIVE THE PS/PC/MRG A SAY IN THE DIRECTION OF THE COMMITTEES, A STAKE IN THE COMMITTEE WORK AND MORE INVOLVEMENT IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS, IN CONTRAST TO THEIR PRESENT NEGATIVE ROLE. (B) CONTINUE REGULAR CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN

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THE PRESIDENT AND LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION, LABOR AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AT CRITICAL MOMENTS, SUCH AS BEFORE EACH LEGISLATIVE SESSION, BEFORE MAJOR CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS, IMPORTANT FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES AND SUMMIT MEETINGS. (C) TAKE INTO THE GOVERNMENT MEMBERS RECOGNIZED BY ALL SIDES FOR THEIR COMPETENCE AND NON-POLITICAL BACKGROUND. (D) PROPOSE REFORMS WHICH GO FAR ENOUGH TO WIN PS SUPPORT WITHOUT PROVOKING CATEGORIC RPR REJECTION. THE SUDREAU REPORT ON CORPORATE REFORM AND TAX REFORM ARE TWO IDEAS WHICH HAVE LAID FALLOW FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS. AN INCREASE IN THE MINIMUM WAGE AND IN PENSIONS IS PRESUMABLY WHAT THE PRESIDENT HAD IN MIND IN SPEAKING OF SOCIAL INEQUITIES LAST WEEK (REFTEL). IN THE ECONOMIC AREA, ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS FOR REDUCING UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND TAX INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE INVESTMENT ARE POSSIBLE AREAS WHICH COULD TEMPT LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT FROM THE VARIOUS PARTIES. UNFORTUNATELY FOR GISCARD, HOWEVER, THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS ARE SUCH THAT HE CANNOT OFFER THE GAULISTS OR THE LEFT VERY MUCH WITHOUT RISKING THE QUICK UNRAVELLING OF THE STABILIZATION THUS FAR ACHIEVED BY THE BARRE PLAN.

7. IN 1974-75 THE PS SUPPORTED THE GOF'S BILLS FOR ABORTION AND DIVORCE REFORM -- WHILE MUCH OF THE PR AND RPR ABSTAINED. THE PS ALSO SUPPORTED THE BILL TO GIVE THE VOTE TO 18-YEAR OLDS. AT THE TIME MUCH OF THE MAJORITY CRITICIZED THE LATTER MEASURE OUT OF A FEAR THAT YOUNG PERSONS WOULD VOTE OVERWHELMINGLY FOR THE LEFT. GISCARD CAN TAKE COMFORT IN THE RESULTS OF THE MARCH ELECTIONS; EARLY ANALYSES INDICATE THAT THEY VOTED ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE LEFT THAN OTHER AGE GROUPS. GISCARD'S LEGISLATIVE ROUTE WOULD NOW SEEM FAIR-

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LY CLEAR; HE WILL INTRODUCE MEASURES WHICH WILL HAVE AS BROAD AN APPEAL AS POSSIBLE, SEARCHING FOR HIS CONSENSUS AT LEAST AND FIRST OF ALL IN PARLIAMENT. IF GIS-CARD MANAGES TO CAPTURE THAT SUPPORT, HE WILL HAVE PREPARED THE WAY FOR PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION, WHICH WOULD IMPLEMENT IN A STRUCTURAL WAY HIS CONCEPT OF A MODERNIZED FIFTH REPUBLIC.

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